



HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION

20th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva (Switzerland)

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Item 4

General debate

Human Rights House Foundation statement

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Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

The Eurovision Song Contest ended in Baku but in Azerbaijan repression continues, as underlined by the Human Rights House Foundation and its partner NGOs in our joint written submission.¹ **Photographer and blogger Mehman Huseynov is viewed by many local campaigners as “the first victim of Eurovision” with the renewed repression against journalists and human rights defenders.**² **This repression follows a public statement by the presidential administration urging civil society to take action against critical journalists and activists.**³ **Authorities also adopted legislation on access to public information, which contradicts international freedom of information principles.**⁴

These moves occur against the backdrop of an overall alarming freedom of expression situation, which must be addressed.

We are also worried that the special rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions have not received any reply from the Azerbaijani authorities to their joint communication on the killing of Rafiq

¹ See the joint NGO written submission to the Human Rights Council (UN Doc: A/HRC/20/NGO/83): <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18277.html>.

² See the joint international NGO statement: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18267.html>.

³ See the joint NGO written submission to the Human Rights Council, page 3 (UN Doc: A/HRC/20/NGO/83): <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18277.html>

⁴ See: <http://azerbaijanfreexpression.org/library/press-releases/azerbaijani-civil-society-groups-condemn-proposed-amendments-to-draft-laws-on-freedom-of-information/>.

Tagi⁵, who died on 23 November 2011.⁶ We should also remember that to date, nobody has been brought to justice for the murder of editor-in-chief Elmar Huseynov.⁷

In a foreword to a joint NGO report on Azerbaijan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression Frank La Rue wrote that “it is unfortunate to note that a number of the recommendations my predecessor issued to the Azerbaijani authorities following his visit have thus far gone unheeded, in particular in regards to impunity. The authorities should take steps now to ensure that the cycle of violence against journalists and impunity for their attackers goes no further.”⁸

We would also like to remind the Human Rights Council that more than one year ago, the Azerbaijan Human Rights House was asked to cease all activities until an agreement with the authorities was adopted. The Azerbaijan Human Rights House has still not been given the permission to reopen.⁹

We call upon the authorities of Azerbaijan to drop all charges against journalists, human rights defenders, and political activists, including activists from the Kura region, and protect their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Madam Chairperson,

We are equally worried by the recent moves of the authorities of the Russian Federation aiming at restricting activities of civil society.¹⁰

The amendments adopted in June 2012 to the law on public rallies and to the administrative code create a restrictive legislative framework and have a chilling effect on the public engagement of civil society.

These legislative changes come along with investigations and harassment of human rights defenders and independent journalists. Russian authorities should recognise the right to be a human rights defender and act accordingly.

On 17 May, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, and on 21 May, the United Nations world day of cultural diversity, human rights defenders of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine faced violence when assembling in favour of human rights for all, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.¹¹ We call upon all states to protect those working for rights of vulnerable groups and ensure that all enjoy the right to freedom of assembly.

Thank you.

⁵ Case AZE 4/2011 (see: [https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/20th/AL_Azerbaijan_09.12.11_\(4.2011\).pdf](https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/20th/AL_Azerbaijan_09.12.11_(4.2011).pdf)).

⁶ See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17329.html>.

⁷ See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17726.html>.

⁸ See the joint report of Article 19, Index on Censorship, International Federation of Journalists, Media Diversity Institute, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Reporters Without Borders, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, and HRHF, *Running Scared. Azerbaijan's Silenced Voices*: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17833.html>.

⁹ <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17735.html>.

¹⁰ See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18187.html>.

¹¹ See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18178.html>.